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NETWORK A MEETING RECORD

Network A Plenary Meeting October 16-17, 2003, Lisbon, Portugal

Participants

Wendy Whitham, Australia
Helmut Bachmann, Austria
Jürgen Horschinegg, Austria
Christiane Blondin, Belgium (French)
Luc Van de Poele, Belgium (Flemish)
Jerry Mussio, Canada
Pavla Zieleniecova, Czech Republic
Jørn Skovsgaard, Denmark
Thierry Rocher, France
Jochen Schweitzer, Germany
Zsuzsa Hamori-Vaczy, Hungary
Gerry Shiel, Ireland
Ryo Watanabe, Japan
Iris Blanke, Luxembourg
Fernando Córdova, Mexico
Paul van Oijen, Netherlands
Jules Peschar, Netherlands
Lynne Whitney, New Zealand
Anne-Berit Kavli, Norway
Glória Ramalho, Portugal
Vladislav Rosa, Slovak Republic
Anna Barklund, Sweden
Anita Wester, Sweden
Erich Ramseier, Switzerland
Jason Tarsh, United Kingdom
Elois Scott, United States
Jay Moskowitz, Acting Chair
Maria Stephens, Network A Secretariat

Presenters

Irwin Kirsch, ETS (ICT)

Regrets

Michael O’Gorman, Canada
Pirjo Linnakylä, Finland
Chiara Croce, Italy
Myungjoon Lee, Korea
Guillermo Gil, Spain
Sevki Karaca, Turkey
Eugene Owen, United States
Andreas Schleicher, OECD Secretariat

Summary of Major Outcomes

- Regarding the long-term data strategy, the Network A Secretariat will draft a strategy paper for the Network taking account of the comments and concerns expressed at the meeting.
- The Network A Secretariat will make a final revision of the indicators for *Education at a Glance* 2003 and submit them to OECD (with a copy to Network members) in January 2004.
- Regarding the Network A/C Task Force on Teaching and Learning, the Network A Secretariat will attend the next meeting in December and convey members’ thoughts on the strategy for indicators and how the work might be taken forward in the future within the Network.

- With regard to miscellaneous requests, members will send information on analysis and reporting activities from PISA 2000 or planned for PISA 2003 to the Network A Secretariat for inclusion in the next newsletter. The Network A Secretariat will provide members with brief information on methodology and progress of an activity in the United States to compare NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA items and frameworks.
- The dates for the next meeting in Lucerne, Switzerland are: Thursday and Friday, March 18-19, 2004 for the Network A meeting, and the preceding Monday through Wednesday, March 15-17, 2004 for the BPC meeting. The October 2004 meeting will be in Bilbao, Spain.

Welcome and Introduction

Jay Moskowitz opened the Network A meeting and welcomed new participants, including: Zsuzsa Hamori-Vaczy from Hungary and Elois Scott from the United States. He also gave regrets for: Michael O’Gorman from Canada; Pirjo Linnakylä from Finland, Chiara Croce from Italy, Myungjoon Lee from Korea, Guillermo Gil from Spain, and Sevki Karaca from Turkey, as well as from Eugene Owen and Andreas Schleicher.

Brief Update on INES Activities

Maria Stephens then gave a brief update on INES activities based on a review of information provided by the OECD Secretariat. She noted three areas of work. First, several publications were released between July and October of 2003, including:

- *Literacy Skills for the World of Tomorrow*, reporting on key PISA results for non-OECD and OECD countries;
- *Integration, Cooperation and Support: First Results from the International Survey of Upper Secondary Schools*;
- Two thematic reports, on self-regulated learning and on student engagement in school;
- The PISA 2003 frameworks document; and
- *Education at a Glance* and *Education Policy Analysis*.

Also related to publications, Maria noted that through the INES Technical Group, OECD is planning to release a Handbook for Internationally Comparative Statistics, which will define the standards, concepts, and classifications used in INES statistics and indicators. The Technical Group will review drafts of the handbook in December and publication is expected in April 2004.

Second, she described several cooperative activities that are underway with other international organizations. Cooperation with the EU/Eurostat continues with the further development and implementation of the UOE data collection and work to develop indicators of training, adult education and labor market outcomes. With the World Bank and UNESCO, the World Education Indicators project continues with 19 countries and the joint publication of a report focused on financing education. OECD also continues to work with UNESCO in the analysis of PISA results for non-OECD countries.

Third, Maria offered updates related to work at the OECD Secretariat to establish a program of work and associated budget for the various work areas outlined in the INES conceptual framework. The key tension in this activity is to try to keep the scope of work both focused and yet large enough to be useful for providing information for policy formation. She noted that the backbone of this activity was a priority-rating exercise, in which 20 countries participated, and which asked countries to rate each of the activities identified in the various work areas as (1) essential, (2) relevant but not essential, or (3) having low or no relevance for national priorities. The idea is that the ratings would be used to identify core activities, which could be financed by a central budget. The criteria that have been suggested for identifying core activities are that 50 percent or more countries rate the activity as essential or that 75 percent rate it at least as relevant.

Maria ended by describing results from a preliminary synthesis that was done with data from 20 responding countries. Across all activities, including both implementation work (e.g., PISA) and development work (e.g., Task Force), about 60 percent were rated essential, one-third as relevant and only 8 percent as having low or no relevance. Looking at the results for each activity and work area individually, nearly all activities, with the exception of work related to analyzing non-OECD country data, would meet the criteria specified earlier—though there is obvious variation among the percentage with more essential ratings and those with more relevant ratings. Looking at the activities most closely related to Network A’s scope of endeavor: (1) work related to PISA’s implementation and continuation and development of indicators of learning outcomes received strong support, with 75 to 100 percent of countries rating these activities as essential; (2) nearly 75 percent of countries rated the development of a long-term strategy for outcomes as essential; and (3) roughly 55 percent deemed the ICT development work and elaborating a strategy for indicators on teaching essential, with 95 percent rating these areas at least as relevant. [A copy of the source material, an OECD Powerpoint presentation, is attached.]

Discussion on Long-Term Data Strategy

The first day of the meeting was devoted to discussion on the Network’s long-term data strategy. Jay opened the session with an introduction to the discussion paper in the briefing book and its reference to the need for an overall mission statement. To kick off the discussion, a draft mission statement was distributed to which members reacted. The statement read:

The Network A data strategy promotes the collection and analysis of timely, comparable and policy-relevant information on the learning outcomes of students and adults. Data analyses based on the strategy provide benchmark, trend, and contextual indicators to inform the following issues: improving the quality of learning; ensuring equitable access and improving the effectiveness of education systems in moderating the impact of social background; ensuring adequate and effective management of resources; and improving the durability of knowledge and skills and their social and economic relevance.

Members noted that any future mission statement should: note whom the information is to serve (e.g., policy makers); acknowledge the importance of a reporting and communication strategy as a component of the overall strategy; identify where the strategy fits in the context of INES and other international and national activities; include cost-effectiveness as a criteria; and be cautious

in naming specific (and sometimes normatively described) policy goals that the strategy might inform. It also suggested that the question of whether adults were part of the strategy should be revisited.

The Network then turned, after a review of the background of the original data strategy from Jay, to a roundtable discussion on possible future directions for the data strategy at an overarching level and specifically on what countries had gained from PISA.

- Anita Wester noted that PISA was viewed as one of several sources of information on learning outcomes in Sweden, important as an international reference point. She noted that PISA has garnered consistent media attention in Sweden, though she also noted its tendency to focus on results that pointed out areas of deficiency or with room for improvement.
- Lynne Whitney noted that in New Zealand, there had been a recent shift from a system-driven perspective to a teaching/learning-driven perspective and currently the Ministry is analyzing the information needs in this context and how programs like PISA can inform those needs.
- Wendy Whitham identified PISA's function to provide regular benchmarks as its biggest draw in Australia and noted that interest in the results there has focused on profiling high performing countries to look for explanations of good performance and on the confirmation of performance differences among different subgroups of students within the country.
- Anne-Berit Kavli noted that PISA has gotten some attention in Norway, but suggested that the impact of international studies may be limited by recent expansions of national assessment activities in Norway. She also noted that Norway supports extending the PISA cycle.
- Jørn Skovsgaard noted that while PISA had not provided any definitive answers about policy directions, it had helped raise a number of important questions—he mentioned that policy makers were surprised at some of the results, particularly with regard to equity. He also noted the important balancing role that the data on cross-curricular competencies played vis á vis the literacy measures in Denmark.
- Jürgen Horschinegg suggested that PISA was playing a key role in Austria in supporting, fostering, and interacting with a shift in the education community toward more evidence-based policy making. He suggested finding ways to feed information about what countries are doing into the steering process and that the strategy should then focus on what information we need the most and how we can do it best.
- Jerry Mussio noted the positive perception of the PISA instruments/program among researchers and educators in Canada, where the greatest interest has focused on the provincial-level breakdown of results. In terms of future directions, he suggested that from the Canadian perspective there is interest in improving and expanding secondary analyses of PISA results.

- Jason Tarsh said that there had been a great deal of interest and attention to PISA in England, but as of yet only limited impacts on policy. Policy makers there are interested in better explaining what may account for England's relatively high performance in PISA, suspecting a possible curriculum-matching effect. He noted the concern in his country, and anecdotally from others, about getting better explanations on the differences between the PISA and TIMSS assessments.
- Pavla Zieleniecova also suggested that more could be done in the future to promote deeper understanding of assessment results and how to connect these to policy recommendations. She suggested, for example, countries participating in a networking group on these topics supported in some way from the international level. She also expressed support a four-year cycle for PISA.
- Luc van de Poele noted that PISA results have good credibility in Flanders because of the high relevance of the age group near the end of compulsory school. He suggested that there needs to be a framework for presenting and understanding equity measures, as well as for understanding changes over time. He also noted an interest in Flanders in high-end competencies, as well.
- Erich Ramseier said that in Switzerland, there has been interest in comparisons with high performing countries; concern over the relatively high impact of SES and immigration on national results; and the necessity of clarifying the role of different assessments in the future.
- Christiane Blondin noted that PISA was having a significant impact in the French community in Belgium, though she noted that perceptions might differ among different audiences (such as policy makers versus teachers). Like some others, she noted the utility of possibly networking with researchers in other countries related to secondary analysis and reporting.
- Speaking as the new representative from Hungary, Zsuzsa Hamori-Vaczy noted that PISA was having some impacts on national curricular reform, as the country is moving toward competency-based and more integrated approaches.
- Adding to her previous comments, Anita Wester supported other members' comments that the policy implications of PISA remain for the moment unclear. To this end, she suggested that the thematic reports perhaps are too detailed and technical to serve the purposes they were originally intended to. She also supported a longer PISA cycle and requested more information on the differences between assessments.
- Addressing the strategy overall, Fernando said there is high interest in Mexico for comparative information on teaching and instructional practice.

After the lunch break, Jay asked members about the utility of sharing information, which had been mentioned by several members.

Most members were supportive of or sympathetic to the idea, though also offered some cautions. Lynne Whitney suggested that the Network needed a communication strategy, related to the overall data strategy, which would establish the mechanisms for communications. Pavla

Zieleniecova noted that having an official communication strategy could support securing resources at the national level for similar activities. Jürgen Horschinegg suggested that a communication strategy might include networks to promote the sharing of information and discussion but also peer review groups to look across results and analyses and OECD reviews of different groups of countries. Similar to Lynne's comments, he noted the role of a strategy to develop the "architecture" for an on-going process. Jochen Schweitzer suggested that cross-country thematic reviews might be a role for Network A. Erich Ramseier and Jason Tarsh both noted the high level of intellectual resources and broad knowledge of many different education systems that are needed to support such activities.

Then, Jay outlined several specific topic areas to be discussed: adults, ages, major/minor domain issues, and periodicity. There was some confusion initially about distinguishing the data strategy from decisions about the future of PISA per se. To clarify, Jay noted that the data strategy is the Network's opportunity to frame what happens in PISA and that the two obviously go hand-in-hand and overlap. He noted that the data strategy should look about 10 years forward and not necessarily be bound to what is feasible at the current moment. Jules Peschar offered his conceptualization that the overall mission statement should be very general and broad (e.g., emphasizing maintenance of trends and conduct of development work); that the data strategy should be the next level down, which establishes key parameters like ages and domains of interest; and that mechanisms like EAG, PISA, etc. are operational elements, with their own particular strategies. Also, the differences in the strategy development process at this point in time, compared to the previous experience in the mid-1990s, was remarked upon. Whereas previously the strategy process was essentially to create PISA, PISA has now been well established. In some ways, this allows the Network to think much more broadly but also reminds of the need to carefully coordinate the overall strategy with the emerging PISA strategy, driven also by the Strategic Development Group.

There was much discussion on the various issues outlined during this session and subsequent sessions on the second day. For the purpose of space, the minutes will capture the consensus and any recurring or major issues that were brought up.

- **Target population.** There was a strong endorsement for the maintenance of the 15 year-old target population, mainly because of the imperative to try to maintain the trend lines in the key literacy areas. To the suggestion from Flanders that the age be increased to or supplemented by a 17/18-year-old cohort, the Network did not want to specify its inclusion (like age 15) but did not specify its exclusion from future consideration. The arguments for exploring an older age group included that it: could provide a measure of the value added from 15 to 18; could provide a picture of workforce entry; is a good summative point for many education systems; and would foster development of strategies to measure what was previously considered a difficult population to measure for sampling reasons (e.g., students out of school, etc.). The arguments against included: concern that the diversity of curricula at that level would preclude the study of value-added; that international assessment would conflict with prevalent examination systems at that age group; that interpretation of results would be too complex; and that it would take energy away from the maintenance of the 15 year-old trend line. With regard to other age groups (e.g., especially younger populations), it was suggested that the data strategy reference the opportunities provided by IEA studies.

- **DeSeCo.** Gerry Shiel raised the issue of if and how to utilize DeSeCo, i.e., whether it should explicitly be a driving framework for a strategy or if an alternative framework should be described. In other words, should the Network think in terms of further developing the areas identified by the DeSeCo framework. Members were generally supportive of competencies remaining at the forefront of the strategy and noted that many of the current activities can be mapped to the framework already, particularly in the area of using tools interactively. Jerry Mussio considered it a reasonable starting point, and Erich Ramseier further suggested that it is a framing device and not necessarily a guide for operationalization.
- **Domains.** On the issue of what to measure, members were clear that reading, mathematical and scientific literacy were high priorities and agreed that the strategy should be couched in terms of the desired outcome (e.g., trend information on these three areas) and not in terms of exactly how such information would be obtained. There was some discussion on whether or not certain domains should be dropped (or only considered as a minor domain) because of strong correlations with other domains (e.g., science and reading), but mostly there were strong arguments against doing so. Erich Ramseier suggested that the high correlations could be an artifact of measurement and that there is interesting information to learn beyond the highly correlated mean results. Possible implications for the data strategy are in the realm of reporting—ensuring that it goes beyond simple reports such as correlations. Luc van de Poele noted another benefit, which is that the inclusion of a subject in an assessment naturally gives in prominence, which may be important at the national level.
- **Major v. minor.** Related to the conversations on what to measure, the Network also discussed if the strategy should specify major and minor domains, what that means, and if additional domains such as ICT literacy should be considered as possible major domains. There was some initial resistance to moving away from the current structure, partly because of not knowing if trends can be established across the years a domain is in its minor phase (e.g., math 2000 to 2003?). Other members did not disagree on the importance of securing trends in key subjects, but supported flexibility in the structure and choice of domains. For example, some members wanted to leave the door open for possibility of computer-based delivery or an integration of science and ICT literacy. Another member suggested leaving a more realistic space in the international assessment for international options, suggesting that a “domain” could be thought of a placeholder for international options or other options tailored for specific country interests. Overall, as long as the strategy specified the desired outcomes for trends in the key literacy areas (specifically referencing being able to report trends in proficiency levels), members were supportive of leaving the wording of the strategy with regard to major/minor structure and possible other domains and delivery mechanisms open and flexible.
- **Periodicity.** The Network also briefly shared their thoughts on how frequently data are needed/desired. Six countries indicated a preference for a three-year cycle; the remainder indicated a preference for a longer cycle of either four or five years.

Two other topics were brought up—background questionnaires versus assessment domains and maintaining the grade-based option—but were not discussed extensively.

In conclusion, Jay said that the Network A Secretariat would re-draft the strategy for the Network, in accordance with the conversations during the plenary meeting, which emphasized an-outcome driven nature, explaining how different activities fit together in a bigger picture, and not neglecting components such as communication and reporting, and in accordance with developments in the BPC's Strategic Development Group.

Presentation on ICT Literacy Framework

To open the second day of the meeting, Irwin Kirsch gave a presentation on development work for assessing ICT literacy in PISA 2006 focusing mainly on the feasibility study that had occurred over the summer. He described the goals of the study, the materials developed for use in the study, how the feasibility study was conducted, and finally what the results and lessons learned were. The Network was very complimentary of the quality of the work, especially under the tight timeline ETS and its partners were working under. [See attached presentation for details.]

EAG Indicators for 2004

Maria Stephens then took the floor to introduce the draft indicators for *EAG* 2004. She referenced the proposal for indicators, which had been reviewed by members over the summer and which called for including six indicators overall—three new and three to be repeated. The three new indicators for review were:

- (1) a first indicator on results from the IEA Trends in Reading Literacy Study, which focuses on changes in means, distributions, gender differences, and performance related to text type between 1991 and 2001 for 4th-grade students;
- (2) a second indicator on students' engagement in school, from a recent thematic report, which describes two measures of engagement and the differences within and across countries on these measures, as well as assesses the extent to which countries have a prevalence of students with relatively low scores on these measures; and
- (3) a third indicator, also from the thematic report, which examines correlations among measures of engagement and key literacy measures. It also presents the results of a cluster analysis that identified profiles of students with regard to their engagement and literacy outcomes.

In addition to these three new indicators, Maria mentioned the proposal to also repeat several key benchmark indicators—from PIRLS on reading literacy in 4th grade and from PISA on reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. This combination of new and repeat indicators was both to be more responsive to the desire at OECD to move toward trying to provide a more comprehensive picture of competencies in each edition of *EAG* and to cover the different work areas in the INES conceptual framework related to Network A. She called for comments from the Network on either the new indicators or the list of proposed indicators. Jay added that OECD would be taking a decision in the coming months on whether or not a rule would be established naming a minimum number of OECD countries that should be included in any indicator, which may affect the proposed indicator on the trend study. Members did not indicate a problem with including the indicator, with only 9 OECD countries, should there not be a rule.

Members then offered several general and indicator-specific comments, including:

- Jørn Skovsgaard noted that mistakes had been discovered in the data for Denmark related to measures of students' participation in school activities and that these data should not be included in the indicator in *EAG*;
- Erich Ramseier asked for additional analysis related to Figure 2.1, in which observed geographic clustering, which might be a source of interesting and useful commentary on possible cultural influences. He also suggested that the information on the cluster analyses—especially the country-by-country analyses—might be too complex for the *EAG* presentation format.
- Jules Peschar asked if it would be possible to reconsider how the clusters were labeled to be more consistent with other cluster analyses previously presented in *EAG*.
- Gerry Shiel requested that if possible country-level correlations be included in the third indicator.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the Network Secretariat would revise the indicators for *EAG* 2004 per members' comments and submit them to the OECD Secretariat.

Updates on Other Projects

Jay Moskowitz then gave a brief overview of the current status of PIRLS, TIMSS, and ALL. He noted:

- With regard to PIRLS: The first meeting of the PIRLS 2006 National Research Coordinators took place in Iceland in September. The agenda included data training for the PIRLS 2001 dataset, outlining schedules and sampling practices, and reviewing possible text passages for the next assessment. Thirty-one countries participated in the meeting and roughly 40 are expected to sign on for 2006. The next meeting will be in the Slovak Republic in February.
- With regard to the ALL Study: The first wave of data collection is completed or nearly completed in six countries (United States, Bermuda, Canada, Italy, Norway and Switzerland). There will be a second wave of data collection in 2005, in which 6 additional countries are verbally committed to participate. Eight others are in negotiation. Initial reporting is expected to occur in early 2005.
- With regard to TIMSS: Data collection for the 2003 cycle is completed. Fifty countries participated in the 8th grade assessment, and 27 participated in the 4th grade assessment. Results will be released in December 2004 for *both* grades and *both* subjects. The next meeting for TIMSS 2003 will be in November in Cape Town, South Africa, to review table shells for the international reports. Related, the 2nd edition of the TIMSS 2003 framework document was recently released and is available on the website (<http://isc.bc.edu>). The science video report will be released in Spring 2004.

Draft Strategy for Indicators on Teachers, Teaching and Learning

Maria Stephens then introduced the draft strategy for indicators on teachers, teaching and learning. She noted that the document was an outgrowth of the last meeting of the Task Force, at which members had discussed possible elements for such a strategy. The options that were discussed were based on a preliminary list of ideas that had been generated by the Network C Secretariat, though she noted that the Task Force members viewed these options as a starting point and had been open to additional ideas. The document first describes the overall goals of the strategy, which are to lay out options for gathering information in two key areas: on macro-level issues related to the quality of the workforce, supply and demand, working conditions, etc. and on micro-level issues such as the impacts of teaching and instructional effectiveness.

Maria also noted the paper's three-prong strategy: (1) an expansion of Network C's existing indicators; (2) a teacher survey across ISCED levels on teachers' attitudes, characteristics and perceptions—the full proposal for which is not yet publicly available; and (3) additional development work to elaborate a more long-term plan for collecting information on the impacts of teaching. She noted that the proposal basically concluded that if what members were truly interested in was information to identify effective teaching practices, the only way to do that would be to use pre-post test designs that measured students' learning, as well as their teachers' teaching practices. In conclusion, she asked for comments. Jay added that members should consider how the further development of the strategy be taken forward and whether or not the task force should continue.

Jason Tarsh expressed some disillusionment about the progress of the Task Force and more broadly questioned reliance on surveys, particularly surveys of school heads given the lack of confidence in teacher surveys that seems to have been institutionalized. More specifically related proposals at hand, he was pessimistic about their utility, particularly because of the difficulty of measuring impacts on students' learning and tracing them back to instructional intervention. Citing the value of international comparisons in this area, however, he suggested that moving in the direction of case studies may be the most promising way forward and to focus on explaining why countries differed so much in the PISA results. Other task force members shared some similar concerns and noted a lack of balance between the two proposals. In terms of possible resources to draw upon in the future, Lynne Whitney noted some work that had been undertaken in New Zealand to synthesize the best evidence on the quality of teaching for diverse students. Jay asked that others members share any similar sources that might relevant with the Secretariat.

On the question of how to move forward, several members affirmed the importance of continuing to work in this area, but suggested that the two Networks could continue on their own, each in the area of work of greatest relative interest. Moreover, as above, it was suggested that the part of the overall strategy related to Network A's area of interest could be reconsidered, perhaps with a view towards qualitative studies that seek to shed light on differences in PISA results. It was reminded that this work should be consistent with the overall Network data strategy. In summary, Jay said that the Secretariat would represent the Network's comments at the next Task Force meeting in December.

Summary and Next Meeting

Prior to the end of the meeting, Jules Peschar took the floor to say goodbye to the Network members, announcing that he would no longer be representing the Netherlands in Network A. As one of the longest-serving members, he took a few moments to review the accomplishments of the Network and encouraged members to continue to view the Network as forum for innovation and experiment to serve the long-term interests of countries related to measuring and understanding learning outcomes. Jay and the members thanked him for his many years of service and personal contributions to the success of the Network.

In conclusion, Jay reviewed the major decisions taken at the meeting (a summary of which can be found at the beginning of this document). The dates for the next meeting are: March 18-19, 2004 in Lucerne, Switzerland, with the BPC meeting preceding on March 15-17.

Jay thanked members for their cooperation and hard work, and the meeting was adjourned.

Attachments

Copies of PowerPoint presentations on INES and ICT Literacy

Information on NAEP-TIMSS-PISA Comparisons in U.S.